

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 003726

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: AND THE SURVEY SAYS . . . GOJ POPULAR

Classified By: AMBASSADOR EDWARD GNEHM FOR REASONS 1.5(B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

¶11. (C) On June 23, 2002, the Center for Strategic Studies (CSS) at the University of Jordan released the most recent iteration of its opinion poll assessing government popularity. The poll indicates that a large segment of the Jordanian public continues to support Prime Minister Ali Abul Ragheb and his two-year-old government, both on issues related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and more generally. Some assert that the poll is flawed, though a contact at CSS naturally denies this. End summary.

CSS POLL RESULTS

¶12. (C) CSS has been tracking government popularity since 1993. Its most recent poll contains seventeen questions, fourteen of which assess public attitudes towards the GOJ's stand on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and popular support for the Abul Ragheb government. The poll samples two groups, a large demographically diverse "national" sample of 1470 adults and a smaller sample of 700 opinion leaders -- businesspeople, professionals, union leaders, politicians, and academics.

¶13. (U) The CSS poll indicates that most Jordanians support the GOJ's strongly pro-Palestinian stand vis-a-vis the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Nearly two-thirds of Jordanians in both polling samples say GOJ policies reflect public opinion to a medium or large degree. In what may be the most revealing item in the survey, many respondents (38% in the national sample and 58% in the opinion-leader sample) believe the GOJ can do nothing to alleviate problems on the West Bank. But even among those who believe the GOJ should do more, only a minority (24% in the national sample and 22% in the opinion-leader sample) favor severing or threatening to sever ties with Israel. The balances in both groups favor moderate measures like sending aid to Palestinians and supporting international political initiatives. Opinions within Jordan's Palestinian refugee camps mirror responses from the rest of the country.

¶14. (U) The CSS poll also indicates a fairly high level of general support for the Abul Ragheb government. Around two-thirds of Jordanians in both polling groups rate the current government's "capabilities" as satisfactory or better. This figure is similar to the figures reported in the five previous CSS polls assessing support for Abul Ragheb's government. On the other hand, respondents list unemployment and poverty as two important areas where the government should concentrate more effort.

REACTION TO THE POLL

¶15. (C) Reaction to the CSS poll is mixed. A Jordan Times editorial praises Jordanian "sagacity" revealed in "reasonable, moderate, realistic and mature" responses to polling questions. On the other hand, one long-time human rights contact believes the poll was crafted to "direct" results favorable to the government. The CSS poll results, he also says, are worthless because the selection of "opinion leaders" is unscientific and susceptible to bias. One former parliamentarian even more cynically opines that the CSS poll results are simply "untrue." "How can we say that the people are happy with the government," he asks, "when the government has failed to ease the economic pressure they suffer from."

¶16. (C) A contact at CSS, Dr. Hassan Barari, defends the poll as being carefully designed and professionally administered. He denies that polling questions are "leading," or that poll results are subject to any outside interference. As evidence of the poll's integrity, Barari notes that the GOJ has previously adopted the unvarnished results of CSS polls even when they were not favorable to it. In addition, Barari says, a reputable and experienced pollster (Tony Sabah) oversees CSS polling and CSS's credibility is such that it now teaches polling techniques to the Government of Yemen.

COMMENT

17. (C) Though CSS is the most respected polling organization in Jordan, it remains difficult to reconcile the published results of the CSS poll with ground-level sentiment in Jordan. CSS polling questions are not obviously leading or misleading, but some questions are so complex that they may have generated poorly-considered responses. (For example, one question assessing government popularity asks, in rough translation, "To what degree do you believe the government of Engineer Ali Abul Ragheb has been capable of shouldering the responsibilities of this era, from the time the government was formed until now?"). Also, some respondents may have feared that their replies would not remain confidential. Still, while it may be difficult to say -- based on this poll -- whether popular support for the current government is strong, the poll does seem to suggest that support for the government has remained much the same in recent months, despite the turmoil in the region. End comment.

Gnehm